

## **International School of Cape Town: Child protection policy and procedure. (Please refer to the ISCT flow Chart of referral in abuse or neglect cases on display in both Staff rooms.)**

### **Policy:**

The International School of Cape Town fully recognises its responsibilities for child protection as prescribed by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. (For particular reference, refer to Article 1: definition of the child, Article 3: best interests of the child, Article 4: the protection of rights, Article 12: respect for the views of the child and Article 18: parental responsibilities; state assistance. Learners should be made aware of their rights (Article 42)

Our policy applies to all staff, parents, learners and volunteers working in the school. There are five main elements to our policy:

- Ensuring we practice safe recruitment in checking the suitability of staff and volunteers to work with children.
- Raising awareness of child protection issues and equipping children with the skills needed to keep them safe.
- Providing procedures for identifying and reporting cases, or suspected cases, of abuse.
- Support for learners who have been abused in accordance with a child protection plan agreed with her or him.
- Establishing a safe environment in which children can learn and develop.

We recognise that because of the day to day contact with children, school staff are well placed to observe the outward signs of abuse. The school will therefore:

- Establish and maintain an environment where children feel secure, are encouraged to talk, and are listened to.
- Ensure children know that there are adults in the school whom they can approach if they are worried.
- Include opportunities in the Physical, Social and Health Education (PSHE) and Life skills curriculum for children to develop the skills they need to recognise and stay safe from abuse.

We will follow the procedures set out by the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) “**Abuse No More**” (WECD Policy) and take account of guidance issued to:

- Ensure we have a designated senior person for child protection who has received appropriate training and support for this role.

- Ensure we have a nominated Director / parent representative responsible for child protection.
- Ensure every member of staff (including temporary and supply staff and volunteers) and governing body knows the name of the designated senior person responsible for child protection and their role.
- Ensure all staff and volunteers understand their responsibilities in being alert to the signs of abuse and responsibility for referring any concerns to the designated senior person responsible for child protection.
- Ensure that parents have an understanding of the responsibility placed on the school and staff for child protection by setting out its obligations in the school prospectus.
- Notify Child Welfare if there is an unexplained absence of more than two days of a learner who is on the child protection register.
- Develop effective links with relevant agencies and co-operate as required with their enquiries regarding child protection matters including attendance at case conferences.
- Keep written records of concerns about children, even where there is no need to refer the matter immediately.
- Ensure all records are kept securely; separate from the main learner file, and in locked locations.
- Develop and then follow procedures where an allegation is made against a member of staff or volunteer.
- Ensure safe recruitment practices are always followed.

We recognise that children who are abused or witness violence may find it difficult to develop a sense of self worth. They may feel helplessness, humiliation and some sense of blame. The school may be the only stable, secure and predictable element in the lives of children at risk. When at school their behaviour may be challenging and defiant or they may be withdrawn. The school will endeavour to support the learner through:

- The content of the curriculum.
- The school ethos which promotes a positive, supportive and secure environment and gives learners a sense of being valued.
- The school behaviour policy which is aimed at supporting vulnerable learners in the school. The school will ensure that the learner knows that some behaviour is unacceptable but they are valued and not to be blamed for any abuse which has occurred.
- Liaison with other agencies that support the learner such as social services, Child and Adult Mental Health Service, education welfare service and educational psychology service.
- Ensuring that, where a learner on the child protection register leaves, their information is transferred to the new school immediately and that the child's social worker is informed.

## **Procedure:**

### **1. How to identify child abuse**

The following is a summary of the main types and typical symptoms of child abuse. The symptoms are covered in more detail in the WCED “**Abuse No More**” document.

Symptoms must be viewed in isolation. If there are any doubts about these symptoms, these should be discussed with the school counsellor or line manager.

- **Physical abuse**, e.g. injuries over a period of time or at various stages of healing (cuts, bruises, burn marks, abrasions, fractures) which cannot be explained.
- **Neglect**, e.g. the child does not grow and/or loses weight, is pale and emaciated, is constantly vomiting and/or has constant diarrhoea or does not reach developmental milestones within normal age-range.
- **Sexual Abuse**, e.g. pain or unusual itching of genitals or anal area, sexually transmitted diseases, difficulty in sitting or walking, regular urinary infection or continual irritation and/or mouth sores (owing to forced oral sex)
- **Emotional abuse**, e.g. bedwetting, soiling and continual complaints of headaches, nausea, and/or stomach pain for which there is no physical cause.

The following procedure should be applied if there is any suspicion of some form of child abuse:

- Sensitively gather information without implicating any person.
- Document the information in a file (e.g. information from the learner, information from other learners and/or parents, and reports from parents and teachers).
- Treat this information as highly confidential (all information gathered must be placed on a separate file and stored in a strong-room or safe.) This information must not be discussed with other teachers, staff, learners, or parents.
- Report suspicions to the school counsellor or to the principal, who will then follow the procedures outlined in the WCED policy document.

## 2. Dealing with disclosure

Disclosure of abuse can be a very traumatic experience for both the complainant and the school counsellor or teacher assisting the child, and must be handled as sensitively as possible.

Section 3 part 2 of the WCED policy document (pp 12-20) provides guidance on how to handle disclosure.

**At the point of disclosure it is preferable to minimise the role of the teacher and to hand over to the School Counsellor.**

Remember to document all information gathered from the learner and to use guidelines in the policy document to ensure there is sufficient information to warrant disclosure. This will also help should the South African Police Services (SAPS) require a sworn statement in a criminal case.

**Please do not use the guidelines as a checklist during discussion with the child concerned. The complainant must be given the opportunity to speak spontaneously.**

The following procedure and principles should be applied by the School Counsellor during or after disclosure.

**Step 1:** Ensure the safety of the learner (in collaboration with the SAPS and the school counsellor, ensure that the learner will not have direct contact with the alleged offender).

**Step 2:** Explain to the learner that all the information will be treated in confidence, but there is an obligation to report the case to other role-players such as Social Welfare and/or the SAPS. The roles that the various parties will play as well as the procedures that will be followed are laid out in steps 3 – 9

**Step 3:** The school principal should be informed (unless he or she is implicated). No detailed information about the alleged abuse needs to be disclosed at this stage.

**Step 4:** The relevant role-players provided in the list below should be contacted within three days after the incident in order to decide on the process of intervention. (If there is any uncertainty who to contact, contact the school social worker or the **WCED's Safe Schools Call Centre at 0800-45-46-47**. Other contact numbers are provided on page 33 of WCED policy document.

- The local welfare organisation;
- The school psychologist;
- The Child Protection Unit;
- The SAPS in the residential area of the complainant;
- Labour Relations, when employees are the alleged offenders;
- The complainant's parent(s) (with the consent of the complainant, if she or he is over 14), provided that they are not the alleged offenders;
- The Child protection Centre;
- The Department of Health and the Department of Social Services;
- The school nurse (if available), or (if applicable) the ELSEN school nurse.

**Step 5:** A confidential report should be compiled by the School Counsellor with the assistance of the teacher and/or school principal for the social worker and the SAPS. Confidentiality should be maintained by following the procedures provided on page 27 of the WCED policy document.

**Step 6:** A meeting with the relevant role-players mentioned in Step 4 should be convened in order to draw up a plan of action to indicate the responsibilities of each participant in the interview process. The school principal must then report the case or incident to the Head: Specialised Support Services at the relevant Education Management and Development Centre (EMDC).

**Step 7:** The School Counsellor (or school principal) will follow up with all the role-players, document the process and inform them of the progress. He or

she will also pass the information on to the Head: Specialised Support Services at the relevant EMDC.

**Step 8:** At all times, the learner and her or his parent(s) should be kept informed of the steps taken by the role-players and the outcome of the investigation.

**Step 9:** The learner's emotional, mental and physical health should be regularly monitored by the School Counsellor or school principal and discussed with his or her parents. If necessary the learner should be and referred for further professional help.

### **3. Dealing with alleged offenders**

The following guidelines refer to situations where the alleged offender is another learner, a teacher or school employee, or a school principal.

#### **What to do when a learner is the alleged offender:**

- Follow steps 1 – 9 above to assist the alleged learner offender. This should be seen as an attempt to prevent the alleged offender from committing further abuse. Implement the following additional procedure if necessary:
- Contact the alleged offender's parents, inform them of the incidents and discuss a plan of action for support and intervention.
- Refer the alleged offender for emotional support and therapy if necessary.
- The alleged offender should be dealt with through the school's disciplinary procedure. (If the offence was serious enough to merit suspension or expulsion the school principal will refer the matter to the governing body of the school.)

#### **What to do when a teacher or school employee is the alleged offender:**

- The parent, teacher or employee to whom the disclosure was made should inform the school principal.
- The school principal will inform the Head: Specialised Support Services at the relevant EMDC, who will in turn inform the department's Labour Relations personnel.

#### **What to do when the school principal is the alleged offender:**

- The employee to whom the disclosure was made should inform the Head: Specialised Support Services at the relevant EMDC, who will then inform the department's Labour Relations personnel. The employee to whom the disclosure was made should also forward all relevant documents to the Head: Specialised Support services at the local EMDC.